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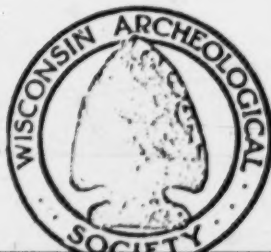
THE WISCONSIN ARCHEOLOGIST

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	Page
DECORATIVE USES OF SHELL .. Dr. Herbert W. Kuhm	112
CULTURAL CHANGE AMONG THE WINNEBAGO	Nancy Oestreich 119
EARLY FOND DU LAC COUNTY INDIAN MEMORIES	Henry J. Rueping 126
LAWS RELATING TO APPROPRIATIONS TO THE WISCONSIN ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY	Wisconsin Legislative Reference Library 129
MAN MOUND DEED	132
WILLIAM ELLERY LEONARD, AN APPRECIATION	Charles E. Brown 135
THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR LEGENDS AND FOLKLORE	Theodore Mueller 136
HAVE.... YOU.... READ	Editor 138
CHERT FLAKINGS	Secretary 140

VOL. 25 NO. 4
(New Series)

DECEMBER, 1944



[Title page]

CULTURAL CHANGE AMONG THE
WISCONSIN WINNEBAGO

Nancy Oestreich

Introduction

- 121 Cultural change is one of the outstanding factors in the life
178 of the Winnebago today. It is important to mention at the
outset, however, that the following article does not purport to
trace the long history of cultural change among the Winneba-
go, nor does it have any claim as a complete analysis; but, be-
cause of space limitations, it will serve merely as a passing
observation of cultural change in a particular Indian group.
- [114] The study is based primarily on observation of one small group
of Winnebago during a period of five weeks. None the less,
these data seem to comprise a fairly, though far from com-
pletely representative sample with which to work.
- 101 The Indians observed were family groups from almost all
121 of the Winnebago communities scattered throughout the cen-
tral part of the state. Our group, consisting of some 45 fam-
ilies, was predominately one of Wisconsin Winnebago, but al-
so included three Winnebago families from Nebraska and one
family each of the Chippewa, Menomini and Potawatomi
tribes. The presence of these minorities within the larger
group of Wisconsin Winnebago offered an interesting study
of inter-land and intra-tribal contrasts.
- 121 The Wisconsin Winnebago prefer to live more or less in-
619 dependently in their native territory, Wisconsin, rather than
[657] join their friends and relatives on the Winnebago reservation
[574] located, by a whim of the government, in Nebraska. There
is, however, a constant exchange of visits between the two
groups.
- 221 In Wisconsin many of the Winnebago earn a living
in the winter by trapping for the fur market, and in the sum-
mer by following various Wisconsin crops. The harvesting
begins in the spring with the strawberry season, and ends in
the fall with the gathering of cranberries.

Cultural Change

120

It was during the 1944 cherry season, a period extending 114
from the early part of July to the middle of August, that the
bulk of material was collected for this paper.

Attitudes Within the Changing Society

Opinions vary of course with Indians, according to the 178
amount of education they have had, their native intelligence, 182
or their personal interests. Furthermore, the contrast in at- 561
titudes between the older and the younger generations is a
most significant feature.

It would be impossible to put age limits on the terms "old-
er" and "younger," but an age between 45 and 50 seems to
be the dividing line. One might also have to add a third
classification: those individuals who grew up in the situation
of the younger group, but upon reaching greater maturity tend
toward the opinions of the older people.

The young people, through contact with the older gen-
eration, or by taking part in tourist-trade ceremonials, are apt
to know the old dances and songs, but seem to feel that these
things are pointless or merely a means of making a living.
They have been living in an unstable, changing society since
birth and follow along in the uncertain Indian-white pattern
of culture with no particular ambitions or interests in what it
may eventually produce in their own futures.

The young people from Nebraska contrasted strongly with 184
those of Wisconsin in this respect, being generally more pro-
gressive and better educated; but it would be unreasonable to
infer that this is a typical difference between the Wisconsin
and Nebraska Winnebago since the representation of the Ne-
braska Indians in our group was so small.

Many of the older people, on the other hand, can remem-
ber when the Winnebago retained enough of their original
culture to have a fairly complete and working social organiz-
ation. They blame all the misfortunes of the tribe on the
young people, who according to the old people, do just as they
please in matters of morals, ethics and religion, and they fur-
thermore have no respect for the opinions of the older mem-

121 WISCONSIN ARCHEOLOGIST Vol. 25 No. 4

178 bers of the tribe. The older generation does not generally
182 try to resist the change, nor encourage it, but rather the ten-
561 dency is to mourn the past. A few realize that the unhappy
plight of the younger generation is but one of the many chang-
es in their society brought on by the breakdown of tribal or-
ganization due to contact with white religion, liquor, and gov-
ernment.

[86] Originally the training of the young was in the hands of
[62] the elders of the tribe and rules were put into effect by group
controls; whereas now these controls have gone, and it is only
in recent years and only among a few families that the idea
of parental control is stressed in the same manner as in white
society.

Consequently we have the picture of a younger generation
following their particular whims and an older generation wea-
ring the wrongs of such a situation but feeling powerless to re-
lieve it.

Types of Cultural Change

178 Having become acquainted with the attitudes of members
of a changing society, let us consider cultural change itself.
For purposes of simplification we can break down our main
bending of cultural change into four types.

1. We are all familiar with the direct Indian-to-white cul-
tural change which is of so long standing, and so obvious that
it hardly requires further explanation other than mentioning
the Indians' use of white foods, houses, clothing, and the
myriad other aspects of white culture which have become a
part of the Indians' life.

2. One of the complexities of cultural change is that some
customs taken over from the whites remain relatively static
in the Indian society, but continue to change at a faster rate
in the white group. A good example of this is in the realm of
material culture. The women's buckskin dresses were of
course long ago exchanged for broadcloth and other fabrics
fashioned along Indian styles, but these were later replaced by
cotton dresses in the last century following the then current

Cultural Change

122

mode. The older women still prefer to wear this type of dress, and very often the ensemble includes moccasins rather than shoes on their feet and a blanket draped about their shoulders. Most of the young women, however, dress very much as white women of their own age. 178

3. Another type of cultural change is found in the Indians modifying some aspect of white culture with elements of their original culture to suit their own needs and tastes. This is best illustrated by the trend that religion has followed among a large proportion of the tribe. Some of the Winnebago who have been enticed away from their old religion, and yet were not satisfied with orthodox forms of Christianity, have adopted the Peyote or Mescal Religion which they prefer to call The Native American Church. This did not originate among the Winnebago, but came in from the southwestern tribes about 50 years ago, and has even undergone changes among the Winnebago group. The Peyote religion is basically Christian, stressing the literal acceptance of the Bible and the strict following of Christ's teachings. It, however, embodies the use of a fairly harmless drug, peyote, which when taken in large enough quantities produces visions, so familiar in Indian religions. The use of a small drum, eagle feathers, and ornate rattles, as well as the burning of cedar leaves are included in the night-long ceremonies. This religion might be considered a transitional form between the so-called pagan religion and Christianity, but though it embodies characteristics of both religions, it appears to have reached a definite stabilized form and will probably undergo few changes in the future. 178 195 [276]

4. We also have change completely within the society from old Indian to new Indian traits. The old Indians tell of an original Winnebago language, very ancient and now almost completely forgotten, which has been replaced by a newer, but still very Indian type of language. In recent years the language has undergone other changes, but this is due to white contact. It is strange that the Winnebago of Wisconsin who have been forced to live in scattered groups and in close contact with whites, have maintained their language to a much greater extent than some of the Wisconsin Chippewa or Me- 178 191 [170]

123 WISCONSIN ARCHEOLOGIST Vol. 25 No. 4

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nomini who live on reservations and, it seems logical to assume, would be likely to consider themselves more of a cultural entity, and so be better equipped to preserve their language. None the less, this does not seem to be the case according to Chippewa and Menomini informants who claim that many of their younger people do not speak the tribal language, whereas a majority of even the smallest children among the Wisconsin Winnebago are bi-lingual.

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In considering our four types of social change, we might almost add a fifth type, which arises from a reaction against white contact and is a tendency to return to old patterns, as in the case of the revival of the scalp and victory dances which practically died out after the last World War. These dances have come into prominence in the last year or so with the Indian boys again going on the "war-path."

Cultural Change and Cultural Stability

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Although we are considering cultural change among the Wisconsin Winnebago, the picture at this point seems rather one-sided without some mention of resistance to cultural change. Despite the constant and long-continued process of change, there is still retained a surprising amount of old Indian culture. Christian missionaries and the Peyote Religion have not managed to do away with the Thunderbirds, Water Spirits, and the rest of the pagan hierarchy. The Medicine Lodge continues as an important factor in the life of many Wisconsin Winnebago. Unfortunately, the writer's data are limited regarding the present number and ages of the adherents to the pagan religion, or as they prefer to be called, the conservative group.

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It is interesting to note that practically all of the Winnebago, whether from Wisconsin or Nebraska, whether Christian, conservative, or pagan, still refer to their children by ancient religiously determined names. They are used in preference to the Christian names which all Indians now possess. These Indian names for boys and girls are merely an indication of the order of age and sex of the children in any given family, and are not to be confused with clan names which are

Cultural Change

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individually bestowed upon members of the conservative group.

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The list of old Indian traits still found among the Wisconsin Winnebago could be extended at great length to include items of diet, clothing, religion, amusements, healing, social organization, and many other aspects of the culture, but of course cannot all be discussed in this article. There is, nevertheless, one final and important feature, and that is that the Indian definitely considers himself a member of a distinct race, and that differences in white and Indian outlook are inherent in the blood rather than due to societal processes.

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Conclusion

From observation of current trends and from the reminiscences of informants, it seems safe to conclude that the pattern of change outlined above will be followed in coming years with an ever-increasing tendency of the Winnebago to take on more and more of the aspects of white culture. Naturally changes vary from community to community, but the overall picture of the forms of cultural change seems to hold true.

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There is one important point which may affect the Winnebago in unforeseen ways, and that is the present war. As far as influencing cultural change today, it is more of a nuisance than an acting force. True the Indians are notably patriotic in the purchase of war bonds, and Indian boys are in all of the fighting forces; but for the most part, except where tragedy strikes individual families, the Indian thinks of the war as apart from his affairs. Some older people still feel strongly about the irony of Indians fighting for a country they themselves already have lost.

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There is, of course, the inconvenience of tire and gasoline rationing on a people who lead a semi-nomadic life, but in our group, as far as the writer could ascertain, this did not constitute a great problem.

Many Indians have begun working in defense factories since the outbreak of the war, but even then they manage to stay in fairly isolated groups, as witness the Badger Ordnance Plant,

125 WISCONSIN ARCHEOLOGIST Vol. 25 No. 4

178 where the majority of Indian workers live in a separate camp,
722 and the camp itself is somewhat divided according to the different tribes located there.

[729] However, the war will undoubtedly have its social affect when the Indian soliders return from an existence of strict discipline to the semi-nomadic life of the Winnebago group. Even the veterans present at this summer's cherry camp showed a sense of dissatisfaction and a feeling of estrangement from the society.

178 In brief summary of the general picture of cultural change;
182 we have wide variations in attitude toward the cultural situation between the older and younger generations in a group representative of many Wisconsin Winnebago communities. In this group, cultural changed in intensity from complete cultural shift of Indian to white traits, to various stages of cultural transition and modification. Finally, there remain a considerable quantity of old Indian traits preserved intact.

From the observation of past and present cultural trends, it appears safe to predict the continuance of now recognized types of cultural change, but we must bear in mind possible future developments brought about by the present war.

000 As a final note it is important to remark that this study is far from complete, and is but a basis for future research.

The writer would like to thank her Winnebago friends, particularly Mr. John C. Decora of Wittenberg, Mr. Mitchell Redcloud of Merrillan, and Mr. Nat Long of Wausau, who made this article possible.